

In The RELIGIOUS WORLD

A GOOD MAN'S BAD SONS.

The International Sunday School Lesson for February 21 is "The Death of Eli and His Sons."—1 Sam. 4:1-18.

(By William T. Ellis).

Patenthood, priesthood, piety and powers are the fourfold themes of the living pictures from the old Book which is this week's Sunday School Lesson. One does not have to search far to find here a rational program of progress and reform for our own land and time.

The cynical proverb about "Preachers' sons and deacons' daughters" is not true, as repeated statistical showings have demonstrated. Children of the manse do not ordinarily go wrong; quite the contrary. Sufficient exceptions remain, however, to give point to the saying. "The preacher's son who strays is sure to be noted because he is a preacher's son."

Some ministers are so engrossed in the larger concerns of spiritual truth and moral progress, that they imperceptibly drift into the state of mind of that statesman who said that he "had no time for individuals."

Home to every minister and teacher and Christian worker comes the intimation that no amount of public service can atone for failure to be true to one's responsibilities in one's own home.

The American Father's Failure.

Eli, the priest of Israel at Shiloh, was a good man and efficient priest. He was devoted to the altar and to the glory of God. He was a kindly, considerate character, as his dealings with Hannah and Samuel showed, but his love was lax in his own household, where a firm hand was needed.

Old Eli was a prototype of the American father, engrossed in large concerns, who lets his sons have their own way. A prominent business man in New York said to me one day, "I really do not know my son. You see, he has been away at school and college, and on summer vacations most of his life, and when he is home for a short time, he has evening engagements and friends at the house." That man was beginning to realize that perhaps, in spite of the success that had made him a marked personality in the great metropolis, he had not done a man's full duty by his time.

A moral menace today is this laxity on the part of the American parents. We are building our homes without woodsheds, and without that discipline for which the woodshed proverbially stands. The idea of law and discipline is lacking from myriads of American boys, whose parents send them off to private schools in the hope that hired teachers will make up for parental neglect. It is not uncommon for wealthy fathers to give their boys huge automobiles as toys with which to break speed limits and frighten pedestrians. Then they wonder why the new generation is growing heedless of the rights of man and of the laws of the land. We are sowing the wind of self-indulgence and we must expect to reap the whirlwind of moral anarchy. Old Eli returns from the distant past to challenge every parent to his primary duty as a man—a father.

Glass Houses.

It is easier to find fault with Eli than to train our own sons. He did fail in the rearing of Hophni and Phineas, his sons. They abused their position and their opportunity, and because he was so very lenient with them, God sent him a warning by the lips of the child Samuel. Even then Eli was not equal to the drastic measures required, and the corrupt priests continued in their positions of influence. Eli bent beneath the sorrow of his life in pathetic dignity, perhaps exercising the grace of resignation when he should have employed the virtue of swift, strong action.

When we are thinking about the failure of Eli with his sons, we must not forget that he also had much to do with the rearing of Samuel, Israel's greatest prophet. It is true that Hannah helped more than a little, but it was under the influence of Eli that Samuel became a statesman of God. Lest we be moved to condemn the old priest too much, we are reminded that Samuel's own sons proved unworthy.

Since we live in glass houses, let us be easy on Eli the aged. He had real nobility of character. The blow that killed him was not a personal bereavement, but the news that the ark of the covenant had suffered calamity. As we look about us, we cannot escape the fact that godly parents may have wastrel sons. Even the best of fathers and mothers cannot wholly determine the moral and spiritual life of their children—al-

though the home where holiness is made attractive is the best cooperating agent that the Lord Almighty has on earth.

The Preachers And The Acid Test.

Quietly and soberly, as they talk by firesides and over luncheon tables, thoughtful Christian men are saying today to one another that the problem of the church is the problem of the preacher. This is no unmanly effort to shift responsibility from their own shoulders. But the proverb "Like priest like people" was never more true than now. The world wants spiritual leadership. It is eager for tidings of truth and for a clear note of certitude from the man who speaks for God. The opportunities before the Christian ministry were never greater than in this year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifteen.

While the vast majority of the preachers of the gospel are men of clean life and of godliness and of self-sacrifice, there is nevertheless a lack of leadership, of vision and of power. The church is confessedly not meeting the needs of our time. Reluctantly, we are forced to say, as was the verdict of old Israel at the time of our lesson, that the weakness of the church is the weakness of the priest.

The sons of Eli had corrupted the people. Their self-indulgence had made a scandal of religion. They stopped at nothing in the way of shameless, open sin. They were not ministers, but were ministered unto. The old epigram is recalled, "Once the church had golden bishops with wooden croziers and then the shepherds fed the sheep. Now we have wooden bishops with golden croziers and the sheep feed the shepherds." Worship at Shiloh had been profoundly impaired by these sinful sons of Eli. Their evil had eaten like a gangrene into the life of the people.

When The Church Cannot Win.

The background of this lesson is the battle between the Philistines and Israelites. When the armies were joined in array Israel was smitten and four thousand Israelites fell. It was a dark day for the Chosen People. In panic, runners were sent quickly to Shiloh to bring to the battle the Ark of the Covenant, that emblem of victory at which the Jordan had parted, the symbol of the presence of Jehovah.

The fame of the God of the Hebrews was in all the land, and the Philistines were scared when they heard of the approach of the Ark. They expected to be routed by this supernatural ally. Nevertheless, when the shouts of the expectant Israelites rolled over to their camp as the Ark drew near, the Philistines were afraid and cried: "God is come into the camp. * * * Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all manner of plagues in the wilderness." Nevertheless, they were not craven, were these Philistines, and they exhorted one another, "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men. O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men and fight."

Tragically, the Ark proved impotent. To the amazement of everybody, the victory remained with the Philistines. Thirty thousand of the Children of Abraham fell before the valiant swords of their foes. The Ark came upon the battlefield amid shouting of joy and hope; it left in the hands of the foe, amid the wailings of the wounded and the prisoners. The symbol of the Presence had been ineffective. The calamity of calamities had fallen upon Israel. Its religion could not make good in the supreme test.

Of course the significance of the story is plain to our day. The outward forms of religion are not enough. Songs and symbols are insufficient. The church and power are not necessarily synonymous, as we know to our sorrow. The most corrupt city politically on the continent is the most famous for its churches. Unless the symbol is supported by a pure, priesthood and a consecrated church, the Presence which it is supposed to represent is invoked in vain. The church fails when it relies on its churchiness.

Ecclesiasticism is mighty today. It has money and brains and social prestige. But it has not power. The Christian church has twentieth century ingenuity but it has not first-century victories. From the battlefield of Aphek let us learn the great lesson that the church is powerless, except she be true to God and His law.

Piety and power are not synonymous, unless the former is pure. Religion means righteousness, or

else it is hollow mockery. Real godliness is irresistible. The forms of godliness may be futile and vain.

In our own time the Christian church is facing her greatest problems and greatest tasks. She has foes within and without. Diversified enemies confront her. Can she win her battle for God and human welfare? Yes, but only if she be true to Him and has the power of godliness as well as the form thereof.

THE BEEKS WE RE-READ.

Terse Comments on the Uniform Prayer Meeting Topic of the Young People's Societies—Christian Endeavor, etc.—for February 21.—"Favorite Chapters of the Bible, and Why."—Ps. 23:1-6.

(By William T. Ellis).

I have read Kipling's "Kim" at least a score of times; Drummond's "Greatest Thing in the World" repeatedly; Barrie's "Sentimental Tommy" half a dozen times; and Maclaren's "For Conscience's Sake" in his "Auld Lang Syne" equally often. No book is worth reading once that is not worth reading often. We naturally return to favorite passages. That is why every earnest Christian's Bible is thumb-marked on certain pages, and opens almost of itself to loved portions. Not all of the Bible is of equal value and interest. Nor do the same parts always make an appeal to all persons. Each of us has his treasured chapters. This Christian Endeavor topic provides something in the nature of an experience meeting, where every one may tell of his "finds" to others.

Certain chords on the piano will set the chandelier to vibrating. So particular passages from literature—and from the Bible especially—awake an answering response in the reader's own heart.

Of all the treasured words in this Book which has been more assiduously and intimately studied than any other, doubtless the most generally prized is the Twenty-third Psalm, the "Shepherd Psalm" of David. What it has meant to uncounted millions of God's people throughout thousands of years passes the imagination to grasp. Hunted martyrs have pillowed their weary heads upon it and slept in peace. In the dark of dank dungeons it has been a song and a stay. Aspiring youth and spent age have alike found sustenance in its beautiful passages. This immortal song meets humanity's common need for a refuge, a protector, a guide; we are all sheep, and these words turn us to the Shepherd of our souls.

Literature which takes cognizance of man's heart hunger and homesickness, which promises him deliverance from the world's weight of woe, is the literature which writes itself into the lives of men and women. Thus the New Testament counterpart of the Shepherd Psalm, and sharing with it the favor of Christians, is the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel—"Let not your heart be troubled." The comforting, compassionate Christ, in the midst of His own sorrows remembering the loneliness of His friends, pictured to them to Father's house, with its many homes that never break up. Permanence—that is what our souls seek, and what Jesus promised in the words spoken in this narrative of His last night of human fellowship with His chosen comrades.

Life lights up literature. Favorite passages are those which have been made luminous by some personal experience.

When the lamp of faith burns low, and the soul's vision is dim, then we turn to the portrait gallery of the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where a cloud of witnesses to the power of faith are aligned in living array. Our hearts take new fire and our eyes are opened; for "faith cometh * * * by the word of God."

Strikingly, the most moving brief portrayal of the Man of Sorrows is not found in one of the New Testament biographies, but in the Book of Isaiah. The fifty-third chapter, with its heart-stirring picture of the suffering Saviour, ranks at least third among Bible passages in the popular favor of Christians. Has all literature any more affecting lines than these?

"He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not."

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The person who has sinned, and who is burning with remorse and contrition, has no words of his own with which to utter his soul's cry like those written by David in the fifty-first Psalm, after he had fallen so grievously. Millions of penitents

have cried aloud to God in these immortal words of the Psalmist.

The literature of our day gives little counsel for the man in trouble, and the man beset with enemies, except to "laugh it off" or "grin and bear it." Far deeper is the comfort with which the Bible abounds, in such passages as the twenty-second Psalm. The cry of the soul for succor, and its pen of praise to Jehovah for deliverance, are perhaps better set forth here than anywhere else.

Great chapters of the Bible, even if not so intimate and personal and individual as others, are those which write down the laws of life, the platitudes of God's kingdom—the twentieth chapter of Exodus, and the fifth of Matthew.

The human touch, with flashing phrases of loyalty and love, is found in the brief letter to Philemon which Paul wrote, a letter all too little known.

The most soaring minds of all time have devoted their pens to an analysis and apotheosis of love, but it remained for John the Beloved, in the latter part of the fourth chapter of his first letter, to reach the summit. No litany for lovers is equal this. Even Paul's philosophical presentation of love, in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, lacks the fire and glow and exaltation of John's great words, beginning:

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

SEVEN SENTENCE SERMONS.

What concerneth every man is not whether he fail or succeed, but that he do his duty.—Ian Maclaren.

Kinds words produce their own image in men's souls, and a beautiful image it is.—Pascal.

Rich through my brethren's poverty—
Such wealth were hideous! I am blest.

Only in what they share with me,
In what I share with all the rest.
—Lucy Larcom.

The method of the enterprising is to sketch out a map of possibilities, then to treat them as probabilities.—Bovee.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.—Ps. 46:1.

A voice within us speaks the startling word, "Man, thou shalt never die!"—Richard H. Dana.

The fate of the country does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.—Thoreau.

IMPRESSIONS OF VILLA.

New York Herald.

When "Mother" Jones, who has aided the miners of this country for nearly half a century, heard yesterday that Francisco Villa had named himself dictator over Mexico she grinned happily.

"Well, I helped him sixty-five dollars' worth," she said, and related the hitherto unrecorded story of how she spent the Christmas offering sent her by her "boys" from the mines a year ago.

She had been in Ludlow and West Virginia, then affected by riots, battles and suffering. Christmas Day found her in Arizona, near the Mexican border, and it brought her a Christmas present from the miners in the shape of a generous money order.

"I'd been reading a lot about this Villa," she said, as she sat in the Union Square Hotel, occasionally fumbling with her big leather bag or patting her white hair into place. "I says to myself, I'll go see this fellow. I went to see Madero, and he treated me fine; I'll find out if Villa's on the square. So I packs up and off to Jaurez I went. The first person I saw on the street was one of my boys, who I'd gotten out of West Virginia. They were going to hang him there, and he was too fine a boy for that. I got him the money at that time, and here he was. He says, 'Why mother,' and hustles me right up to where Villa was, with his officers."

"Say, did you ever see that fellow? He's a wonder. He looks like the old Harry himself, but I said 'That's a boy that will get there or bust,' and after we talked awhile and he told me what he wanted to do, I just took \$65 out of my pocketbook, all I had left of my boys' present and I said, 'Here, you, take that and buy bullets with it, and lick 'em well.' Villa, he grinned, and said: 'We gee 'em hell, for you, mother. You're the first practical American that reached me here.'"

"So," concluded "Mother" Jones, "I helped that fellow, Villa. I hope he'll remember it and let me go down there and unionize my boys in the mines—if he only stays dictator until I can get there," she added.

The average length of life in England is 44 years.